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## ICC FINDS CILCO TREE TRIMMING PROGRAM LAX ELECTRIC RELIABILITY QUESTIONED

The Illinois Commerce Commission Wednesday ordered Central Illinois Light Company to begin immediately to trim trees and other vegetation away from power lines, to protect against a further decline in electric service reliability.

The order followed a report from ICC Energy Division staff that found CILCO had failed to maintain its tree trimming cycle for several years, which likely contributed to an increase in the number of electrical system interruptions on the system.

For example, ICC staff noted that in the annual reliability report filed with the Commission in 1998, CILCO reported the highest SAIFI (System Average Interruption Frequency Index) statistic of all the Illinois utilities. CILCO indicated that trees caused 73.8 percent of the controllable interruptions after June 10, 1998. In 1999, the utility reported that 38.1 percent of its controllable interruptions were caused by trees. The winds of summer storms cause tree limbs to move greater distances and cause more damage to power lines because the tree leaves offer greater wind resistance than do bare tree limbs.

All Illinois electric utilities are required to file annual reliability reports with the ICC as part of the Commission's ongoing monitoring of service reliability. These reports include statistics on electrical system outages as well as customer outages.

ICC staff said evidence suggests that CILCO had failed to maintain its four-year tree trimming cycle for a number of years, failed to trim trees on two electric distribution circuits for nine years, trimmed trees at an average rate during 1996 through 1999 that equates to a ten-year cycle, which in turn caused the utility's electric service reliability to deteriorate. Staff pointed out that while not all trees that contact power lines will draw enough short circuit current to trip the substation breakers, they can be a danger to utility workers or to the public when, for example, they are trimming trees and come in contact with high voltage lines or a tree branch touching a high power line.

Staff noted that in 1996 CILCO reduced its annual tree-trimming expenditures about 25 percent as compared to each of the prior six years, and made additional tree-trimming budget cuts in 1997 and 1998. While the budget was increased somewhat in 1999, staff has calculated that CILCO's tree-trimming budget for 2000 will not support a tree-trimming cycle of four years.

The Commission ordered CILCO to:

- **Begin to trim trees immediately and otherwise manage vegetation to provide maximum practical vegetation-to-conductor clearance, while considering the rights of property owners, public and worker safety, electric service reliability, previous pruning history, tree health and aesthetics;**
- **Achieve a four-year tree trimming cycle by December 31, 2002;**
- **Keep accurate records of its tree trimming program;**
- **Conduct random inspections of at least ten percent of tree trimming work performed by each contract crew within sixty days after the work is completed; and,**
- **File quarterly reports with the Clerk of the Commission on the status of the tree trimming projects.**

ICC staff conducted random inspections of CILCO electric lines last July in the Peoria, Pekin, Lincoln, Springfield and Williamsville areas, and in all of those areas, except Lincoln, found a number of situations in which tree limbs were in contact with CILCO electric lines.

The Commission will monitor CILCO compliance with the order. The utility will have to bring the vegetation management program into full compliance with a four year trimming cycle by December 31, 2002.

Copies of the ICC staff report and Commission order are available on the ICC web site at **[www.icc.state.il.us](http://www.icc.state.il.us)**.

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